

THE PROGNOSIS OF BURNOUT AND PROLONGED FATIGUE IN THE WORKING POPULATION

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Objective Although burnout and prolonged fatigue are two conditions in which the symptom of fatigue plays a prominent role, their relationship is unclear. Effective treatment of burnout and prolonged fatigue could be hampered as it is unknown whether their prognostic factors are similar or not. This study aims to assess and compare prognostic factors for recovery in burnout and prolonged fatigue.

Method Baseline, 12-, 24- and 48-month follow-up data from the Maastricht Cohort Study (MCS) were used. The MCS is a large prospective cohort study which included 12140 employees from 45 companies and organizations at baseline. Participants were included at baseline who were a prolonged fatigue case as measured by the Checklist Individual Strength and/or a burnout case as measured by the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (n=2356). They were divided into 3 subgroups: “pure fatigue” (n=912), “pure burnout” (n=547) and “burnout & fatigue” (n=897). Baseline predictors of outcome included: (mental) health, work and demographic factors. Predictors of recovery in each subgroup were determined using logistic generalized estimating equations analysis (GEE). Factors which were significantly associated ($p < .05$) with the outcome in a univariate analysis were entered into a multivariate model. Non-significant predictors were removed from the multivariate model using a backward stepwise procedure until only significant predictors ($p < .05$) remained. Age, gender and education were adjusted for in all models.

Results Prolonged fatigue, exhaustion, illness perceptions and time since baseline were important predictors of recovery across the subgroups. Differences especially emerged with respect to work factors: high co-worker support, predicted recovery in the pure fatigue group; high professional efficacy, absence of conflicts with colleagues, doing day work and having enough leisure time predicted recovery in the pure burnout group; high professional efficacy and more career opportunities predicted recovery from respectively at least one condition and both conditions in the burnout & fatigue group

Conclusion Although the subgroups shared a number of prognostic factors, differences especially emerged with respect to work related predictors of recovery. These differences suggest the importance of differentiating between burnout and prolonged fatigue in employees and could provide valuable leads for intervention possibilities.

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